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Was Shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords Political?

The Arizona Democrat was shot outside of Tucson on Saturday morning

MAX FISHER | JAN 8, 2011 | POLITICS

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Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was among 18 people shot Saturday morning at a public meeting the Arizona Democrat was holding with constituents outside of Tucson. At least five people were killed, including U.S. District Court Judge John Roll and a 9-year-old child. Giffords was taken to a nearby hospital, where officials [describe](#) her condition as very critical but said they were "very optimistic" she would recover from the shot to her head. The shooter, 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner, is in police custody. [Andrew Sullivan](#) and [Garance Franke-Ruta](#) are regularly updating at TheAtlantic.com as the story develops. Here is what commentators are saying about the shooting's implications and larger meaning. Initially debate largely focuses on Giffords' record of opposing Arizona's controversial anti-immigration law and whether some conservative rhetoric -- such as Sarah Palin's [controversial "target" map](#), which included Gifford -- could have played a role. Though several liberal writers raise this point, conservatives are so far mostly silent on the accusations.

- **The Ugly Political Context** Slate's [David Weigel](#) explains, "Last year, some Republican politicians used Second Amendment references (remember Sharron Angle and 'second Amendment remedies' if Harry Reid didn't lose) and revolutionary talk to express how angry they were about the state of their country. They strongly and vehemently rejected the charge, from Democrats, that they were encouraging an atmosphere of violence -- especially in the week after the health care vote. When Giffords's opponent held a [fundraiser](#) and pitched it as 'help remove Gabrielle Giffords from office, shoot a fully automatic M-16 with Jesse Kelly,' Democrats saw the specter of violence, and Republicans saw political posturing."
- **Did Extreme Political Rhetoric Contribute?** The Atlantic's [James Fallows](#) writes, "We don't know why the killer did what he did. If he is like Sirhan, we'll never 'understand.' But we know that it has been a time of extreme, implicitly violent political rhetoric and imagery, including SarahPac's famous [bulls-eye map](#) of 20 Congressional targets to be removed -- including Rep. Giffords. It is legitimate to discuss whether there is a connection between that tone and actual outbursts of violence, whatever the motivations of this killer turn out to be. At a minimum, it will be harder for anyone to talk -- on rallies, on cable TV, in ads -- about 'eliminating' opponents, or to bring rifles to political meetings, or to say 'don't retreat, reload.'"
- **Avoid Ideological 'Shoehorn'** The National Review's [Jonah Goldberg](#) sighs, "I've been trying to filter out the urge to vent my rage at those who

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opponents, or to bring rifles to political meetings, or to say 'don't retreat, reload.'"

- **Avoid Ideological 'Shoehorn'** The National Review's [Jonah Goldberg](#) sighs, "I've been trying to filter out the urge to vent my rage at those who immediately shoe-horned these awful crimes into their ideological prism. There have been some truly disgusting displays of opportunism out there. I will confess to having made those kinds of mistakes in the past and I try very hard to learn from those mistakes. If I had my druthers, the news networks would ban political commentators of all stripes for the first 24 hours after these kinds of tragedies. The rush to be wrong first is just too hard for some to resist."
- **'Climate of Hate'** The New York Times' [Paul Krugman](#) writes, "You know that Republicans will yell about the evils of partisanship whenever anyone tries to make a connection between the rhetoric of Beck, Limbaugh, etc. and the violence I fear we're going to see in the months and years ahead. But violent acts are what happen when you create a climate of hate. And it's long past time for the GOP's leaders to take a stand against the hate-mongers."
- **Fire Krugman; Shooter Is Liberal** Gateway Pundit [Jim Hoft](#) fumes, "If *The New York Times* was a respectable news organization Krugman would be reprimanded or fired. ... Of course, Krugman wrote this before we found out that the shooter [Jared Loughner](#) is a left-winger who considers the Communist Manifesto one of his favorite books. It's time for Krugman to go!" However, as Reason's [Radley Balko](#) notes, "Alleged shooter's fave authors include Rand, Marx, Hitler, Harper Lee, Plato, Aesop, Orwell. Should be enough to confirm all biases."
- **Signs of Paranoid Schizophrenia** A reader emails [Andrew Sullivan](#), "I'm a licensed psychologist with 20 years experience. I've watched the Jared Loughner Youtube videos. They show evidence of delusions of persecution. Loughner's less than coherent language also suggests a formal thought disorder. While Loughner can't be diagnosed without a full exam conducted in person, there are significant indications in the videos that he suffers from a psychotic disorder. ... If I had to guess, I'd go with paranoid schizophrenia. If that's the case, his politics are irrelevant."

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Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

JEAN M. TWENGE

One day last summer, around noon, I called Athena, a 13-year-old who lives in Houston, Texas. She answered her phone—she’s had an iPhone since she was 11—sounding as if she’d just woken up. We chatted about her favorite songs and TV shows, and I asked her what she likes to do with her friends. “We go to the mall,” she said. “Do your parents drop you off?” I asked, recalling my own middle-school days, in the 1980s, when I’d enjoy a few parent-free hours shopping with my friends. “No—I go with my family,” she

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How America Lost Its Mind

KURT ANDERSEN

When did America become untethered from reality?

I first noticed our national lurch toward fantasy in 2004, after President George W. Bush’s political mastermind, Karl Rove, came up with the remarkable phrase *reality-based community*. People in “the reality-based community,” he told a reporter, “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality ... That’s not the way the world really works anymore.” A year later, *The Colbert Report* was making fun of the phrase. *Real Housewives of America*

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Trump Is 'Locked and Loaded' in a Nuclear Game of Chicken

KRISHNADEV CALAMUR

President Trump this week has gone from [saying](#) the U.S. will respond to North Korean threats with “fire and fury like the world has never seen” to [clarifying](#) those words were perhaps not “tough enough,” and to spelling out Friday, in case there were doubts, that the U.S. military was “locked and loaded” to counter any threat.



Is the World Slouching Toward a Grave Systemic Crisis?

PHILIP ZELIKOW

On August 5, Philip Zelikow delivered the following keynote address at the annual meeting of the Aspen Strategy Group, a discussion forum for experts and government practitioners. Zelikow, who is currently the White Burkett Miller Professor of History at the University of Virginia, has served at all levels of American government, and for administrations of both parties—including roles at the White House, State Department, and

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How to Deal With North Korea

MARK BOWDEN

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Thirty minutes. That's about how long it would take a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launched from North Korea to reach Los Angeles. With the powers in Pyongyang working doggedly toward making this possible—building an ICBM and shrinking a nuke to fit on it—analysts now predict that Kim Jong Un will have the capability before Donald Trump completes one four-year

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Are Index Funds Evil?

FRANK PARTNOY

If you're like me, you've cheered the decades-long rise of index funds—investment vehicles that seem (these days) to be a rare case of financial innovation that actually helps regular people. By trying merely to match the market, not beat it—investing passively in stocks that mimic a published market index, like the S&P 500—they're able to offer both low fees and peace of mind for people not inclined to try to pick which stocks to buy and sell.

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Why Is Trump Turning on the Ally He Needs Most?

DAVID A. GRAHAM

The three people with the greatest power over Donald Trump's political future are Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and Trump himself.

And if the president's recent treatment of McConnell and Mueller is any indication, Trump had better watch out.

The president is on a sustained campaign against the leader of the Senate. For the second day in a row, Trump broke

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Annie Dillard's Classic Essay: 'Total Eclipse'

ANNIE DILLARD

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Annie Dillard's Classic Essay: 'Total Eclipse'

ANNIE DILLARD

Ever since it was first published in 1982, readers—including this one—have thrilled to “Total Eclipse,” Annie Dillard’s masterpiece of literary nonfiction, which describes her personal experience of a solar eclipse in Washington State. It first appeared in Dillard’s landmark collection, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, and was recently republished in *The Abundance*, a new anthology of her work. The Atlantic is pleased to offer the essay in full, here, until the day after the ‘Great American Eclipse’ on August 21.

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Emmanuel Macron: Monsieur Unpopular

YASMEEN SERHAN

Emmanuel Macron has said that he wants to govern like the Roman god Jupiter, staying above the fray of everyday government issues. But less than three months into the French president’s time in office, his poll numbers are proving just how mortal he is. U.K.-based pollster YouGov [reported](#) a seven-point drop in the young leader’s approval rating, which fell from 43 to 36 percent over the month of July. French pollster Ifop [observed](#) a similar decline over the same period, noting that: “Apart from Jacques Chirac in July

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John le Carré Goes Back Into the Cold

DAVID IGNATIUS

John le Carré’s triumph (and consequent burden) is that he created characters and language so evocative of the spy world that they became more real in readers’ minds than real people or events. This happens occasionally with books or movies: Our images of the old South are inseparable from the way it was portrayed in *Gone With the Wind*. It’s said that even real-life members of the Mafia learn how mobsters are supposed to talk by watching *The Godfather*.

[Read more about John le Carré's latest novel, *The Night Manager*, on our website.](#)

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‘Holy Shit, We’re in a Cult’

JACLYN SKURIE AND NICOLAS POLLOCK

EnlightenNext was an organization that promised spiritual awakening. Instead, it turned into a complicated, often-sinister community.

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